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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a strategy for encouraging preservice teachers to use reflective techniques when developing lesson plans. A focus on reflective practice incorporates and integrates the minimal teaching competencies required by West Virginia State Teacher Certification. Practicum students must provide evidence demonstrating at least minimal competency on each designated indicator. Seven practicum students completed a reflective teaching pretest and posttest; participated in structured reflective dialogues with their supervisor; completed weekly reflection forms; and videotaped two episodes of instructional, assessment, or consultative activities. In addition, each practicum student completed a personal/professional development plan that identified teaching strengths and weaknesses and addressed the impact of their personal/professional philosophy on student learning. The practicum supervisor observed planned and transitional activities implemented by practicum students and reviewed daily class outlines, lesson plans, reflections, and videotapes. Analysis of pre- and posttest data indicated that only one statement related to seeking collaborative problem-solving strategies showed significant improvement. Analysis of structured reflective dialogues revealed that the majority of practicum students could specify what learning was being promoted and what targeted learning was taking place, but most had difficulties identifying incidental learning among students. Analysis of practicum students' journals over 12 weeks revealed no overall significant changes. Suggestions to practicum supervisors are concerned with the supervisor-supervisee relationship and the supervisory role in supporting reflective practice. Contains references and suggested readings. (LP)

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REFLECTIVITY IN SUPERVISION AND TEACHING

Introduction: Reflectivity is the ability to turn an experience or subject over in the mind, giving it serious, consecutive consideration. Experience plus reflection and consequential changes in action or direction equal growth (Posner, 1985). According to Gore (1987), "reflection frees us from routine and allows us to create."

Reflective practice is an integral part of effective teaching and professional development. Because education is a rapidly changing field, the ability to reflect on change and its relationship to teaching is critical to leadership development. Special and regular educators today must be prepared to take teaming and leadership roles. In his book, "Mind, Self, and Society," 1934, George Mead emphasized that role-taking becomes an important mode of self-reflection and self-criticism (Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990, p 61). Teachers also need to reflect on the reciprocal and dynamic impact of their own experience on their educational philosophy.

Background: Depending on one's philosophical orientation, the role of teacher as decision maker varies. Positivistic reflection is instrumental; Humanistic reflection is deliberative; Moralistic reflection explicates aims, values, and connection; and Constructivisitic reflection calls for reconstruction at the following three levels: (1) teaching in relation to expected practice and learner outcomes, (2) self, in varied and changing roles of educator, and (3) presumptions and assumptions about educational and societal norms. Van Manen (1977) called this third level the basis for social critique and change (cited in Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990, p. 41).

The Constructivists take the position that, "How a person attributes meaning to the phenomena they experience is an object worthy of study." This brings focus to process as well as to content or facts. Steps in the process of reflectivity are: (1) involvement in a scenario, (2) recording the scenario, (3) reading the record for meaning, (4) abbreviating and representing the meanings for future use, and (5) confirming the meaning in experience of others (Garman, 1986). Reflectivity requires systems analysis and change.

Rationale: Throughout history, teachers have balanced their intuitive and reflective thought using any resources they could find, adapting materials to suit their own purposes and methods. Reflectivity is being practiced in small pockets of the field today, however, it is still and yet not widely supported or encouraged (Vaughn, 1990). This is due in part to practitioners' lack of information about the processes involved, and in part because reflectivity cannot be added onto a service delivery system that does not support it. Because reflectivity requires systems analysis and change, it must be viewed by the professional community as an integral and not an ancillary educational activity.

From the supervisor-mentor perspective, many commonly used tools and strategies for encouraging teachers to reflect more deeply on their teaching roles can be incorporated into practicum experiences such as taping, interviewing, engaging in dialog and discussion, using journals, developing a portfolio. In working with pre-service teachers, the influence of the supervisor is generally enough to command an attempt to reflect. For supervisors working with in-service training programs, however, encouraging teachers to reflect is often much more difficult. Frequently, requests to reflect on current practices are viewed as a threat to personal and professional self esteem and are given only cursory or grudging effort. These teachers are already employed in the field, and often consider that, by virtue of their years of experience, they are necessarily more competent than their respective supervisors. In some instances, they are mindful that the supervisor's opinions rarely tend to effect their employment status, and this being so, are of not much real concern to them. In other instances, in-service teachers are afraid that any criticism will effect their already insecure employment status.

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Some common barriers to be overcome regarding the use of critical thinking and reflective teaching that are faced by practicum students are listed (not prioritized) as follows:

(1) Distrust due to negative perceptions or past experiences with the supervisor/supervisee relationship;
(2) Ego-defensive reactions due to low self-esteem or low professional expectations;
(3) Fear of revealing too much information related to areas in need of further development;
(4) Fear of excessive or unhelpful criticism;
(5) Inexperience and lack of role awareness;
(6) Job insecurity;
(7) Lack of confidence in ability to make real change;
(8) Lack of system supports for reflective practice and deliberation;
(9) Low sensitivity to issues faced by people with disabilities and their need for advocacy;
(10) Poorly developed time management or organization skills;
(11) Time limitations and other environmental constrictions that limit reflective interaction.

Given the range in personal, professional development of these students, and range in their support for using reflective techniques, balanced with the need to work within a competency based practicum required by the state certification board, we decided to apply the four approaches to one existing competency cluster (lesson planning), to make that process more reflective of data-based decision making (Positivistic approach). Supervisor-supervisee sessions are facilitated by a structured dialog format which requires the supervisor and the practicum student to reflect on the same questions directly after each observed lesson is taught (Humanistic and Moralistic approach). A directed weekly journaling component to follow the observed lesson plans was designed to assist the practicum student in identifying their own teaching philosophy as practiced and to identify the contribution of their philosophy to the learning which occurred in the classroom. Additionally, a Personal/Professional Development Plan (Constructivist approach) is required upon completion of the practicum. In this plan, the practicum student uses Reflective Analysis and Synthesis of their teaching activities to:

(1) identify their own teaching strengths & needs,
(2) develop teaching strategies to meet individual learner needs,
(3) increase flexible adaptation to new situations,
(4) promote awareness of the impact of their personal/professional philosophy on individual learners,
(6) promote awareness of the reciprocal impact of their teaching activities on their personal/professional philosophy.

Description: The identification of discrepancies between beliefs and actions is one of the pivotal ideas of reflective practice. By reflecting on these discrepancies, both practicum students and supervisors can improve the effectiveness of their work. Supervisors must facilitate learning, reflect on their own work, communicate proactively, participate in group collaboration, and change norms that are central to current practice (Arredondo, Brody, Zimmerman,, & Moffet, 1995). Supervisors must be mindful that feelings and attitudes of practicum students can affect their learning, and communicate proactively to avert negative affects. While recognizing that procedural knowledge requires some trial and error learning, supervisors must share what they have gleaned from past experiences and the study of best practices.

Practicum students need to feel safe and comfortable in the supervisor-supervisee relationship, so they can see the importance both of completing these tasks and how the tasks are inter-related. They should seek clarity about tasks required of them in the syllabus, and take part in open and meaningful dialogue. They need to continually examine what they do in relation to what they believe, what they believe in relation to what they do, seek more information about those beliefs and actions, and plan for further action (Arredondo, Brody, Zimmerman, & Moffet,1995).

This reflective focus on process incorporates and integrates the minimal teaching competencies that are inherently tied to the West Virginia State Teacher Certification process as outlined in the syllabus. Practicum students must provide the supervisor with evidence to demonstrate at least minimal competency on each designated indicator. Guidelines and roles for the observation and reflection process were established for practicum students and supervisors. Activities included the practicum student completing a Reflective Teaching Pretest and Post-test, engaging with the supervisor in a Structured Reflective Dialog, completing Weekly Reflection Forms, and Video-taping two (2) Episodes of instructional, assessment, and/or consultative activities, with a brief written evaluation describing her or his observation of each taped session to be shared with the supervisor. The practicum student creates a workable Personal/Professional Development Plan (different from the Individual Practicum Plan).

The supervisor visits and observes planned and transitional activities first hand, reviews daily class outlines, lesson plans and reflections, and reviews video taped episodes with the student, using the developed forms as a basis for dialog, and discussing with the student any changes noted. Evaluation criteria were set for each activity on a scale from 1-2 (weak= inability to successfully demonstrate individualization of instruction) to 3 (adequate= formulates and integrates goals and objectives; creates, finds, and conducts activities to meet objectives) to 4-5-6 (strong= recognizes reciprocal impact of beliefs and actions; identifies own learning from week's activities; reconstructs and summarizes weekly experiences in a meaningful way). A strong reflective teacher shows consistent signs of improved development, with strong evaluations in the last week of practicum and a good personal/professional. development plan. An adequately reflective teacher shows consistent evaluations of adequate, with some strong evaluations in the last eight weeks of practicum and a good personal/professional development plan. A teacher is weak in reflection if s/he shows consistently weak evaluations with little or no sign of improved development.

Data Collection and Analyses: The following processes were used to obtain data: (1) The structured dialogues were analyzed qualitatively for emergent themes categorized by information sought on the student's reflection and supervisor's observation reflection forms. Patterns were then identified by looking at types of responses across students, with setting variations taken into consideration. (2) Pre and post-practicum responses on sixteen predetermined items were analyzed using item by item nonparametric comparisons to determine if there were any items showing significant overall movement between pre and post outcomes. Each response was assigned a categorical numerical value from 0-2, with 0 = a negative response, 1 = an expected response, and 2 = a reflective response (as per criteria described above). (3) The weekly structured journaling activity was analyzed qualitatively for reflective changes over time, and was scored on a scale from 1-6 based on the criteria described above. Week by week nonparametric comparisons were used to determine if there was movement over time for each practicum student. (4) The taped sessions were not analyzed other than to form the basis for dialogue between practicum student and supervisor.

Results: On analysis of pre and post-practicum data, only one of the unfinished statements showed overall significant movement in a positive direction between pre and post responses. That was item (7), "When I have a problem in the classroom, I_____;" Items (8), "My family_____my job"; and (9), "My students_____my job," approached significance in the positive direction, away from negative responses that indicated a lack of support for their efforts.

Analysis of the structured reflective dialogues revealed that the majority of practicum students could specify what learning was being promoted and what targeted learning was taking place, however, most had real difficulty identifying the incidental learning that might be taking place among students. About half of the students were able to recognize that impediments to learning were environmental factors that could be manipulated such as interruptions, lengthy activities, external noises, overly structured activities, or ill-suited clothing. One practicum student said, "the child's hood kept falling into her line of vision." Many responses were child-based, however, such as acting out, pushing objects away, child's dependent behavior, children jumping

around, and child's own psychomotor speed. Several practicum students had difficulty naming alternative approaches and methods to presenting their lessons. Those who relied heavily on direct instruction also used more hand-over-hand assistance and less play-based or facilitated discovery learning. In general, those practicum students who varied their mode of instruction to include a number of different types of presentation experienced fewer distractions and socio-behavioral difficulties among children in the classroom. The smooth transition from one activity or setting to another is also a concern.

Analysis of the weekly structured journaling exercises over twelve (12) weeks for seven (7) practicum students revealed no overall significant changes except for the second and third weeks of school and the two weeks surrounding Halloween, during which the general level of seasonal activity for teachers and children is high. Two practicum students consistently remained significantly above median in the strong reflectivity category. Four clustered around the median. One scored consistently below the median. One dropped from variations close to median to well below median in the last week of practicum. This drop, although dramatic for the individual, was still not significantly different from the group as a whole. This is the first cohort studied, and within subjects analysis is currently in progress.

Notable quotes from weekly structured journaling revealed practicum students' surprise that children could accomplish so many independent living tasks, and that play-based activities yield excellent results.There were comments regarding the observation of generalization from one skill area to another. Recognition was expressed that managing the environment can bring better control over outcomes.

One practicum student commented that she learned that small children will indicate their readiness to learn a new set of skills, therefore, she allows the child to take the lead. Comments about parent participation overall indicated low expectation of parents in their assumed child development and child care roles. The general tension created by the dilemma of providing structure and offering opportunity for experiential learning was evidenced. Several reflections emphasized the need to be flexible, respond to children consistently, and communicate clear expectations of their performance. One student emphasized the children's need to be challenged. Modeling appropriate social behavior and an enthusiasm for learning was important to two students. One practicum student talked about the children having a "mind of their own...they think they don't have to listen." The supervisor was then able to encourage practicum student to harness the natural inclination of young children to achieve educational outcomes. Two weeks later, this same student commented that the presentation of visual aids and hands-on learning is more important than actually speaking, and in the next week this student stated that smaller group size works better to maintain the children's interest. In the next to her last week of practicum, this student related that she felt learning did take place, and she did not have to use direct instruction.

All but one of the practicum students are not reading professional material at any nearly adequate level to break their professional isolation and guide their practice.The one practicum student who reflected inconsistently around the median and then plummeted well below the median during the end of her practicum experience was reading about laws, regulations, and procedures for norm referenced testing. She was not enjoying her reading, so she diverted to a search for equipment to accommodate one of the children she serves.

The one student who scored consistently strong in reflectivity recognized the importance of incidental learning in the first week of practicum. Her responses indicated areas in which she was assessing her performance in relation to the learning needs of the children, rethinking her plans, and modifying her instructional approach to meet individual needs. She recognized good planning as a tool to free up time for flexibility and creativity. She successfully identified undesirable behaviors that she was inadvertently reinforcing and implemented a plan to reinforce desired behavior. Perhaps most notably, she is reading about alternative methods of assessment and teaching strategies, Tips for Teachers (Picture Portfolio), "Hands On," a new curriculum. She traveled to Charleston, WV, to learn new procedures for student journaling. She obtained a new "ready to use" vocabulary activity to assist in individualizing curriculum access for one child.

Discussion: The positive movement found for item 7 on the pre and post measure provided a clear indication that practicum students were seeking collaborative efforts at problem-solving rather than trying to solve problems in isolation. Items (8), My family_____my job; and (9), My students_____my job, approached significance in the positive direction away from negative responses that indicated a lack of support for practicum students' efforts.

The reflective dialog that occurred after each observed lesson brought differences and additional comments up on the table for discussion, thus mutual learning from this activity served to enhance the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Zeroing in on differences allowed the student and the supervisor to justify their responses based on their respective philosophies, and to examine and deliberate on how the outcomes of their decisions impact their philosophies. Freeing the interaction from extraneous tensions that typically characterize ordinate/subordinate relationships allowed practicum students to share their ideas openly and asked questions (professional to professional), and supervisors to make suggestions related to the real content of practicum experience. A notable quote from a supervisor was, "Try making two products, one to publish the child's work, and one to take home, thereby strengthening family participation." One practicum student said, "We'll go to a real Bowling Alley someday." One practicum student realized through this dialog that she had helped a student master the concept of reversibility but had not independently identified that she had done so. Taping sessions for review allowed the practicum student to sit back and analyze their own performance, investigate the teacher-child interactions from an external perspective, and isolate aspects in need of change.

Suggestions for Implementation:

Conduct the initial site visit in an introductory and facilitative manner. This visit is for relationship building and clarification of the practicum student's questions regarding the practicum and supervisory expectations of the practicum student's performance.Get to know the building principal, the cooperating teacher (if the practicum student is a preservice student).

Allow for a variety of questions. Ask various types of questions, mainly open-ended questions. Take time to find out what the practicum student plans to do, or is already doing, that would demonstrate minimal competencies required in the syllabus. Mark down those questions you cannot answer on site. Seek the necessary information and respond to the student as soon as possiole. Return all phone calls as quickly as possible.

Maintain a supportive stance with each practicum student at all times. Communicate caring and patience. Accommodate and facilitate learning with consideration of individual styles, abilities, and possible need for accommodations.

Conduct supervisory sessions with concern for the student's dignity and confidentiality. If someone mentions a student that you previously supervised, do not discuss that student's performance or relationship with the university under any circumstances. Practicum students are generally related by nature of the program through sharing common course work experiences. Guard against saying something that may discredit students who have participated in the program.

Make written notations in the marginal spaces provided on forms and narratives. Ask open-ended questions that elicit the student's attribution of meaning to the information you are noting. Discuss your notations with each practicum student. It is not considered good reflective practice to make a notation and then assume the student will get your meaning upon reading it.

The supervisory role is also a professional development role. Make resources available to practicum students. If you don't have specific addresses, find them and phone them or fax them to practicum students. Provide each student with a list of suggested readings on Reflective Teaching. The best way to teach reflectivity is to practice and model reflection. Share your reflective methods and experiences with the practicum students you supervise.

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